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ABSTRACT

Employee training and development (T&D) in business and industry, as a critical function of human resource development, must reflect a whole-health, proactive orientation in helping today's organizations survive in an increasingly competitive market. A proactive T&D orientation is based on humanistic views of work and education and is reflected in critical T&D practices such as content selection, participant selection, learning activity design, and program evaluation. Contrary to the notion that labor is a commodity to be traded for maximum return, the humanistic conception of work is that it has intrinsic value to the human being. The humanistic view of education is that the richest and most challenging environments should be provided, so that individuals can achieve the maximum use of their talents. These conceptions of education and work have two critical implications for the nature of T&D functions: what is trained and how. Proactive T & D not only improves individuals' technical skills but also satisfies their aspirations for personal growth. Proactive training is based on methods that are holistic (instead of presentation in small broken steps), relevant to the individual (instead of blanket training requirements imposed on all employees), and challenging (building on errors instead of minimizing chances for mistakes). Proactive T&D is built upon an organization's commitment to using it as a strategic plan to achieve long-range goals. (19 references) (Author/KC)

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Humanistic Conceptions of Work:

Implications on Proactive Training and Development

Paper presented at American Educational Research Association annual meeting

San Francisco, CA, April 21, 1992

by

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Abstract

This paper argues that employee training and development can no longer be viewed as "bandaids" for annoying problems. Training and development in business and industry, as a critical function of human resource development, must reflect a whole-health, proactive orientation in helping today's organizations survive in an increasingly competitive market. A proactive training and development orientation is based on humanistic views of work and education, and is reflected in critical T&D practices such as content selection, participant selection, learning activity design, and program evaluation.

Central to the humanistic conception of work is that contrary to the notion that labor is a commodity to be traded for maximum return, work has intrinsic value to the human being. The humanistic view of education is that we should provide the richest and most challenging environments in which individuals achieve the maximum utilization of their talents. These conceptions of education and work have two critical implications on the nature of T & D functions. The first relates to what we train, the second to how we train. Proactive T & D not only improves individuals' technical skills but also satisfies their aspirations for personal growth. Proactive training is based on methods that are holistic (instead of in small broken steps), relevant to the individual (instead of blanket training requirement imposed on all employees), and challenging (building on errors instead of minimizing chances for mistake).

Proactive training and development are built upon an organization's commitment to using T&D as a strategic plan to achieve its long-range goals. They reflect humanistic values of work and education, and have been implemented on limited scales by successful organizations. This paper begins to explore ways to implement proactive T&D strategies based on reviews of literature in the T&D and instructional technology professions. More longitudinal research is needed to examine the long-term effects of proactive, humanistic T&D practices on organizations and their employees.

Proactive Training and Development

Today's business environment is characterized by intense global competition. This competition is evidenced most clearly by the opening of world labor markets which has shaken the comfort of American mass production work force. Diffusion of technological advancements and shifting directions of defense industries have also intensified the impact of global competition. One of the most important implications of global competition is that employee training and retraining have become a critical national strategy for a nation to remain competitive. Organizations can no longer afford to view training and development functions (T&D) as "bandaids" for annoying performance problems. Employee training and development must be directly tied to organizations' missions and long-term goals. In essence, T&D must become a "whole health" program and adopt a proactive, long-term orientation.

Studies as early as the Hawthorn studies have shown that people factor is a critical one in an organization's success. With or without technology, competent and enthusiastic employees are one of the most important asset a company has. Multinational corporations such as General Motors, NEC, and Xerox have implemented a long-term organizational commitment to the development of their people (Galagan, 1990; Sekimoto, 1987). A proactive orientation, whether by necessity or by ideology, corresponds to humanistic views of work and education, and has profound implications on T&D practices such as curriculum development, instructional design, and program evaluation.

Humanistic Views of Work and Education

Central to the humanistic conception of work is that work has intrinsic value to the human being (Chomsky, 1988). This is contrary to the notion that labor is a commodity to be traded for maximum return. If people are driven to work by materialistic needs, then we can be expected to do anything that pays well. Yet, some of us choose to teach, others sing, often because we feel a calling (Dewey, 1920) and receive great satisfaction from our work. In other words, the need to work is not solely the provision of money and goods, but rather a way of life, a way of expanding oneself. Creativity and productive work are necessary reflections of human beings' impulse to enrich their lives. A humanistic view of education is that we should provide the richest and most challenging environments in which individuals achieve the maximum utilization of their talents.

Implications on Training & Development

This conception of education and work suggests that a worker's relationship with his or her work may be built upon personal growth needs as well as materialistic needs. The relationship has two critical implications on the nature of T&D functions in today's organizations. The first implication relates to *what we train.* It goes without saying that that in order to benefit from maximum release of human capabilities, organizations must attempt to satisfy individuals' "personal agendas" for working (Lewis & Bjorkquist, 1991). Effective T&D not only improves individuals' technical skills but also satisfies their personal aspirations for creativity and productivity.

The second implication of humanistic conceptualizations on training and development relates to *how we train.* Humanistic theorists believe that educational experiences should be oriented towards freedom and challenge, not direction or control.

Thus, training should be holistic (instead of in small broken steps), relevant to the individual (instead of blanket training requirement imposed on all employees), and challenging (building on errors instead of minimizing chances for mistake). Training that attempts to control and guide trainee behaviors remains alien to trainees, and will at best promote performance with mechanical exactness, but not performance with human energy and occasional genius (Chomsky, 1988).

How do these views influence the everyday activities of T&D practitioners? The real implication is that it is not enough to provide quick-fix training workshops for performance problems in the workplace. For years T&D professionals have been trained on how to put out fires after they have occurred, but this bandaid approach is never as effective as a whole health program approach that is based on long-term, strategic, and preventative thinking. In addition to providing what Lewis & Bjorkquist termed "good work" opportunities (1991), organizations must emphasize the "D" in their training and development functions. In other words, T&D must fulfill its role in long-range development of the organization's work force, a development that will benefit both the the employees as individuals and the organization. Opportunities to gain new skills, update their knowledge, solve complex problems, and develop new interests are crucial to the intrinsic need to grow for most individuals, and should be an important item on any T&D agenda.

This paper explores ways of implementing a humanistic, proactive orientation in critical T&D practices, especially in content selection, participant selection, learning activities, and evaluation. Strategies discussed in this section are gleaned from current literature in T&D and in instructional technology. Although these strategies have considerable theoretical and empirical support, more longitudinal research is necessary to evaluate their impact on an organization's work force.

1. Content selection

Needs assessment . Rodriguez (1988) defines needs assessment as the process of identifying the gaps between current and desired results. It is a critical process in the design of training content. It is only through thorough insightful needs assessment, and needs analysis can T&D efforts "hit the target" and address the true needs of the organization and individuals. This definition necessarily implies that needs assessment reacts to performance deficiencies.

To build a proactive curriculum, needs assessment must go beyond its traditional definition. Needs must be identified based on the company's strategic plans for the future as well as individuals' needs for human development. Thus, instead of focusing on a gap between 50 versus 60 widgets an hour, proactive needs assessment should address questions such as "given this organizational goal for the next ten years, what knowledge, skills, and attitudes must be improved in the work force."

The selection of training content must be proactive in at least two ways. First, training content must be proactive to support organizations' mission. The development of a T&D curriculum cannot be done by a training specialist in isolation. The key to successful proactive T&D curriculum lies in the whole organization's commitment to using T&D as part of its strategic planning. The organization must adopt a "trainer-next-to-CEO" approach that allows the training specialist to become part of strategic planning at the highest level so that the resulting T&D curriculum can be immediately in sync with the organization's mission and strategies. For instance, new management strategies, assumptions, values, styles and structures may result in increased needs for programs in participative management and decision-making. As organizations acquire or develop new technologies, T&D functions must swiftly anticipate the need for technical skills update

programs. Workplace literacy, though a relatively low priority for organizations (Gordon, 1990), can be expected to become an important challenge for future T&D functions. Thus, the curriculum content must include not only what is needed to perform current jobs but also what will be necessary to perform future jobs.

Secondly, training content must also be proactive to support individuals' human development needs. This means that T&D must strike a balance between *training* for performance deficiencies and *development* to enrich employees' professional lives. Traditional views of T&D have typically emphasized training that aimed at strengthening weaknesses, reflecting a reactive bandaid orientation. Proactive orientation to human development broadens T&D's curriculum content to include knowledge updates, career development and planning, knowledge and skills in "neighboring" professions, general problem solving skills, communication skills, family financial planning strategies, retirement planning strategies, health and diet knowledge, time management, stress management, and so on. Typical of humanistic program development is the involvement of the employees in deciding in what content areas they most desire training.

This proactive approach to content selection has been implemented on limited scales by various successful organizations. NEC, Japan's training strategies reflect a shift from a traditional, reactive, problem-fixing orientation to a more proactive, long-term, and problem-prevention orientation. NEC's training program includes language training, international business administration, law, and even training for spouses of employees who are assigned to be stationed overseas. The 84-Lumber Company in Pennsylvania requires its managers and management trainees to attend its 84-University every year. Participants receive concrete information on the latest technologies and products. More importantly, the trainees discuss the company's mission and goals, and evaluate their personal goal accomplishment. The result: the company has become the largest privately owned

lumberyard in the US. These programs indicate a commitment of successful organizations to use training as critical component in achieving their long-term goals.

Much of a proactive curriculum's content may seem irrelevant to job performance. But the value of such content selection lies in the prevention of problems, including technical, interpersonal, family and even financial problems, that directly impact how well an individual performs his/her job. Proactive selection of content also seeks to position individuals for change and promote their continued satisfaction in work.

2. Participant selection

Currently, employees most likely to receive training are sales people, middle managers, and professionals (Gordon, 1990). A proactive T&D curriculum based on the humanistic conceptions of work and education seeks to provide development opportunities for all employees. This way, organizations benefit from employees' increased skills and performance while individuals receive a personal satisfaction in expanding their capabilities. A typical proactive approach to selecting trainees is reflected in succession training, where talented employees are selected to be "groomed" for more challenging responsibilities. This approach not only satisfies the individuals' need to grow and seek new challenges, but also provides a cushion of competent personnel for the organization in days of turnover and expansion.

3. Learning activities

There are three issues relevant to the design of learning activities in a proactive curriculum, including content organization, time organization, and instructional methods.

Content organization. Content organization depends to a great extent on the nature of the subject matter. Mechanical, procedural skills are quite different from

communications or interpersonal relations skills; these differences should be accounted for in the curriculum's content organization. Common training practices are based on behavioral learning principles such as stimulus-response-reinforcement schedules. Content is broken down to small pieces through content analysis, and trainees are taught the most basic, prerequisite information before being exposed to more general skills or information. Much emphasis is placed on learning the small pieces of information or subskills, but little attention is devoted to pulling these subskills together to develop problem solving strategies.

According to humanistic views of meaningful education, the overarching principle for organizing the learning activities in a proactive curriculum should be *problem-based and gestalt-based* (Chomsky, 1988). Whether the subject matter is a procedural skill or a problem solving process, trainees eventually must transfer the learning to real-life situations. And in real life, problems rarely come in small, broken steps, but rather as complex occurrences which require people to differentiate between relevant and irrelevant clues and derive heuristics to approach the problem. Thus, to make learning more meaningful, and to promote future transfer, training content should be organized around prototypic cases or problems and allow trainees to learn new content in the context of a realistic problem (Chomsky, 1988; Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt,1991; McNeil, 1985).

Reigeluth and Merrill (Reigeluth & Curtis,1987) presented the integrated, coherent Elaboration Theory that emphasizes processes such as epitome, "zooming" across concept hierarchies, synthesis, summarization, and elaboration. For teaching procedural skills, for instance, these authors suggest that learners master the simplest possible version of the task before learning variations of the task and related conceptual information. For teaching conceptual information, the instructional sequence may progress from the most important,

comprehensive, and fundamental conceptual structure to less comprehensive concepts. For teaching theoretical content, the authors suggest that the instruction progress from to most basic and fundamental principles to more detailed, complex and restricted principles.

The Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt (CTGV, 1991) explored the use of complex problem scenarios to promote the learning of basic skills. Interesting adventure stories are used to present complex, "adult size" problems (such as how to rescue an injured owl from an island). The stories also provide some relevant information to solve the problem. But the students must identify sub-problems that need to be resolved in order to solve the overall problem, and must research relevant information and learn the necessary skills. Thus, instead of teaching the basic skills and hoping that students will be able to transfer them to real life, these problem scenarios provide a meaningful context for learning the component skills that students often find boring (such as algebra and physics). Furthermore, they help students develop problem solving strategies that utilize what they learn. The content organization strategies provided by the Elaboration Theory and the CTGV problem scenarios can be used to organize training content into more meaningful structures.

Time organization. Time organization of learning activities refers to the length and flexibility of learning time within the curriculum. Time frame of a reactive curriculum tends to be short, with emphasis on minimum period of training for maximum returns. Currently, the average training time for the most intensively trained employees, sales people, is about 40 hours per year (Gordon, 1990). Proactive curriculums must be built upon a corporate commitment to giving employees large amounts of time for training and development as part of their jobs. Time frame of a proactive curriculum should be characterized by *long-term, continuous* offering of programs, with fluid *flexibility* to

accommodate individual developmental needs. Modular designs of training programs may also be necessary to adapt to varied and busy schedules of trainees.

Instructional methods. Instructional methods refers to how learning activities are designed to accomplish the training objectives. Current training methods can be characterized by trainers *presenting* well-organized information to trainees and trainees passively *receiving* information. The emphasis in designing instruction is on how to manage and control the learning situation. Chomsky (1988) argues that instructional environments that focus on controlling stimuli and reinforcement in order to produce predicted behaviors can at best produce performance with mechanical exactness. He distinguishes between *behavior change* and what *is really learned*, and suggests that to expand a person's ability to handle novel problems, the instructional environment must emphasize conceptual change---what is really learned.

As today's organizations attempt to capitalize on their people power in order to maintain a competitive edge, the proactive training curriculum must provide trainees with *holistic, relevant,* and *challenging* environments in which they may expand their knowledge, skill, and problem solving ability. Thus, behavioristic training principles based on stimulus-response-reinforcement schedules and small-step error-free learning are no longer sufficient. Errors should be used as bases for further conceptual development, not road blocks. A large number of cognitive instructional theories and learning principles have been supported with considerable empirical evidence, and should be used to enhance the quality of training.

Cognitive learning principles may emphasize prior knowledge stimulation, generative learning activities, and development of strategies. First, instructional must stimulate and use learners' prior knowledge and world experience. This can be accomplished by using analogies and by having trainees discuss their previous experiences

and strategies. Activating trainees' prior knowledge can not only enhance the relevance of the instructional content but also facilitate efficient processing of the new information.

Second, learners' cognitive processing can be facilitated but not supplanted. Wittrock (1990) suggests that for meaningful learning to occur, the learner must generate personally relevant relationships between the new concepts in the instruction and between the new concepts and his or her own knowledge and experience. This meaning generation process must be carried out by the learner even when the instructional designer has carefully organized the lesson into coherent structures. In other words, instructional designers and trainers can only help trainees learn but cannot learn for them. Thus, learning activities must be designed to help trainees actively interact with the lesson content. This may be accomplished in many ways, across different delivery formats from stand-up group training to individualized technology-based training. Some useful activities include summarizing key points into checklists, designing T-shirts that capture that essence of the lesson, drawing cartoons, performing role plays, demonstrating procedures, writing theme songs, and so on. Often these activities have been prepared by the instructional designer and presented to the trainees as learning aids. But when carried out by the trainees themselves, these activities can enhance both learning and motivation. They can also provide a valuable opportunity for trainees and trainers to monitor how well the content has been learned.

Third, a proactive training program must emphasize the development of strategies in addition to the development of knowledge and skills. Dole, Duffy, Roehler, and Pearson (1991) differentiate between strategies and skills. Skills are defined as automatic, highly routinized, and consistent if not rigid task procedures. Strategies are defined as flexible, conscious and learner-controlled application of knowledge and skills. While skills emphasize consistency, strategies emphasize reasoning. Although subconscious and

consistent application of skills has been the goal of many traditional training programs, people power can be better increased through the development of strategies in transferring new knowledge and skills into real life work situations. Learning activities in a proactive training program should help trainees develop s sense of conscious control over a set of strategies that can be adapted to any situation. This can be accomplished by using diverse examples,case studies and problem scenarios, by having trainees relate the new knowledge and skills to their own work situations, and by emphasizing the reasoning underlying the new information and procedures. Training programs that promote the development of cognitive learning strategies and cooperative learning skills can also lead to the long-term benefit of a work force that is better at learning.

4. Evaluation

Most people agree that evaluation is rarely what it could be in the field of training (Saari, Johnson, & McLaughlin, 1988; Kearsley, 1986). Every existing model of T&D includes an evaluation component (Finch, 1987; Swanson, 1987). Swanson's TTS model prescribes three different levels of evaluation: evaluation of participant satisfaction, learning, and performance on the job. Kirkpatrick's (1960) evaluation model prescribes four levels of evaluation: evaluation of reaction, learning, behavior change, and results or impact on the organization.

Yet, most often, if a training program is evaluated at all, the evaluation is heavy on reaction, feeling of satisfaction, and immediate post-tests on knowledge and skills. Rarely is evaluation conducted to measure long-term effects on the organization's productivity and health. Training specialists of the reactive mentality would be pleased to see data on how the trainees' improved performance has resulted in increased sales during the month after training (Swanson, 1987; Kearsley, 1986).

Such an emphasis on immediate behavior change and financial returns on training is not fit for a proactive curriculum because it focuses on the immediate, the obvious, and the local. There are three possible pitfalls in this short-term, reactive orientation of evaluation. The first and most critical pitfall is that the return-on-investment mentality induces trainers to focus on training outcomes that are easily quantifiable within a short time, such as reduced costs, increased efficiency, increased output, etc. (Kearsley, 1986). Long-term and indirect outcomes such as employee commitment to the organization, job satisfaction, and creative problem solving, etc. are equally important, but less quantifiable and often ignored.

The second pitfall is the evaluation of outcomes that are not necessarily the direct results of training (Kearsley, 1986). If we subscribe to systems theory, it should not be difficult to realize that few performance changes can be the result of training alone---they may not even be related to the training. Increased sales (or decreased sales for that matter), for example, can be affected by incentive systems, market share changes, marketing strategies, as well as the sales force's motivation and skills. Evaluation that simply puts the credit or blame to training is inaccurate and useless.

The third pitfall is choosing insignificant performance measures to satisfy the need for quantitative data (Kearsley, 1986). Most organizations have large amounts of data on various measures such as phone usage and travel expenses, these readily available data may or may not provide any insight into how effective the training is.

The evaluation of a proactive curriculum must strike a balance between the immediate, obvious, and local outcomes and the long-term, indirect, and more strategic outcomes. If the goal of a proactive T&D curriculum is to *position the organization for success in a change-constant environment through strategical improvement of the work force*, then the evaluation component must also take a strategic perspective and address

issues such as employee commitment, motivation, competence, satisfaction, as well as current performance. Also, because the proactive curriculum is a continuous effort to promote individual and organizational growth, the evaluation process must also be on-going.

For example, evaluation of trainee reaction must not only reveal their "happiness" about one training session, but more importantly reveal their continued interest and motivation to learn new skills related to their jobs. Evaluation of learning must go beyond factual recall or mechanical behavior changes; it must reveal changes in trainees' conceptual framework and problem solving abilities. Evaluation of training's impact on the organization must take into consideration of employee commitment to the organization, motivation, satisfaction, creativity, etc. as well as improved quality or increased output. In summary, proactive evaluation must be long-term, continuous, and strategic.

Concluding Remarks

The future society will be one where employment patterns will be characterized by frequent job-changes; those who are employed will find the content of their jobs changing regularly (Weir, 1988). For individuals and organizations to survive and grow, we need a T&D "curriculum which enhances those skills of decision-making, flexibility, and problem-solving which some new society requires rather than a curriculum which enhances the narrow range of practical and personal skills associated with conventional job-holding" (Weir, 1988). It has become clear that organizations must rely on the competence and high performance level of their employees to maintain a competitive edge. The time has come for T&D to become a part of an organization's strategic plans for competing in the global market.

In this paper, proactive, long-term, and strategic training and development has been discussed in the theoretical framework of humanistic conceptions of work and learning. A central argument has been that proactive T&D programs are in alignment with organizations' long-term missions, and are in alignment with individuals' need for human development. Contrary to the conventional view of training and development as a bandaid function to fix performance problems, this paper has suggested that proactive training and development seek to position an organization for change and success through strategically improving the quality of the work force.

Proactive training and development are built upon an organization's commitment to using T&D as part of its strategic plans to achieve its mission. They reflect a humanistic understanding of work as having an intrinsic value to the individual and the notion that organizations can best benefit from maximum human performance by providing individuals with challenging environments for continued growth. Proactive training and development are not only conceptually sound, but also feasible. This paper has discussed how proactive thinking can be implemented in critical T&D curriculum components, such as content selection, participant selection, organization of learning activities, and evaluation.

The notion that training is the first to go during financial difficult times can be an indication of the fundamental misconception of training as a reactive problem-fixing tool. Proactive T&D provides a strategic program that is of mutual benefit for both the individuals and the organization. It is time that it takes its proper place in the organization--a critical strategic function of organizational mission, not peripheral service that will be cut next time the company has a financial bump.

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